Redeeming the Old South in David O. Selznick's *Gone with the Wind*

Edgardo Medeiros da Silva
Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas –
Centre for English Studies – CEAUL / ULICES

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Introduction:

The 1939 filmic adaptation of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* is informed by the same kind of Romantic nostalgia we find in the pages of this timeless award-winning novel, offering its viewers a conflicting vision over the nature and significance of the period of time which followed the end of the American Civil War. Northerners understood that period as one of "Reconstruction", whereas Southerners envisaged it more as a time of "Restoration". I wish to examine in this paper how the film attempts to redeem the South, in line with the essential premise(s) of Mitchell's novel, through its representation of a pre-Civil War idyllic, romanticized South, devoid of the pernicious effects of the "peculiar institution", subjected in a first instance to the aggression of a great Northern invader and, upon its defeat, by a civilian army of Carpetbaggers. In particular, I wish to show how the vision of both the novel and the film are coincidental in their portrayal of this period of American history, Melanie Wilkes being the character which best embodies the values and mores of the Old South — kindness, self-sacrifice, gentility —, whereas Scarlett O'Hara, the heroine both in the novel and in its cinematic version, is the personage which rapidly embraces the principles and ideals which the North represents — materialism, self-interest, acquisitiveness.[1]

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[1] The strength of Southern women, who held society together as their men went off to war, is thoroughly evident in the film. From a feminine perspective, the film and the novel may be read as the restoration of a woman, Scarlett, who against all odds succeeds in raising herself from poverty to newly-found wealth and status.

Covering 1037 pages in its paperback edition, *Gone with the Wind* (*Tomorrow Is another Day* was its initial title) was published in June 1936. Its author, the Georgian Margaret Mitchell (1900-1949), won the National Book Award for that year and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in the next one, but she never published anything of importance after that.[2] Like other Southern apologetic fiction writers, namely Caroline Lee Hentz (1800-1856), who defended slavery in her novel *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854) in terms of its humaneness and economic benefit for the country as a whole, Mitchell believed that the bond which existed between slave masters and domestic servants within Southern households was similar to that which existed among members of the same family.[3]

In American film history, *Gone with the Wind* marks a shift in the film industry from an interest in social and economic matters, which had been predominant throughout the Great Depression, to one based for the most part on pure entertainment. King Vidor's *Our Daily Bread* (1934), Charles Chaplin's, *Modern Times* (1936) and William Wyler's *Dead End* (1937) illustrate quite eloquently this preoccupation with the impact of dire circumstances, whether arising from poverty, unemployment or homelessness, upon the individual and the group. The treatment of the subject of race, though, was not new. It had been a major issue in D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), which had "congealed", in the words of David Levering Lewis, "racist interpretations of Reconstruction in the popular mind" (viii). The making of *Gone with the Wind* was marred by disagreements between George Cukor, the film's first director, and David

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[2] In 1996 a novella entitled *Lost Laysen* was brought out, supposedly written by Mitchell when she was 16, as well as a collection of writings from her youth. The articles she wrote for the *Atlantic Journal* have also been published. *Gone with the Wind* reached a sales volume of one million copies within six months of its publication and was rereleased many times over the course of the years. It was translated into twenty seven languages and more than thirty million copies were sold. Mitchell sold the rights to *Gone with the Wind* soon after its publication for $50,000.

[3] In non-fiction, a particular important name associated with the defense of slavery is that of George Fitzhugh (1804-1881), whose *Southern Thought* (1857) highlights the interdependence between Blacks and Whites. He argued that slavery was a humane and benevolent system of labor which benefited both races.

O'Selznick, its omnipotent producer, who were unable to see eye to eye right from the start of the shooting. For this reason Selznick, who kept a powerful grip on the production and direction of the film, ended up replacing Cukor by Victor Fleming, who was, in turn, briefly replaced by Sam Wood.[4] Through his company, Selznick International Pictures, he bought the motion picture rights the year the novel was published and had the final word on the hiring of the film directors, the screenwriters and the leading cast members. It was his the decision to cast Vivien Leigh as the leading female character, including the choice to engage Will A. Price and Susan Myrick to help her with her diction and Southern accent. Selznick also kept a vigilant eye over the sketch artists, set builders and wardrobe designers. His name features prominently in the opening frames of the film, in the poster advertizing it and in the twenty-five cent booklet sold at the theatres where it was shown, with detailed information on the careers of the most important cast members.[5]

The musical score of *Gone with the Wind* was written by Max Steiner, who was well-known in Hollywood circles for his compositions for theatre and film. Selznick was responsible for the hiring of Steiner, under contract with Warner Bros. His film score captured remarkably well the nostalgic elements present in the film, the sense of a long-lost golden era when Southern life was trouble-free and its citizens coexisted peacefully with their domestic and plantation slaves, in particular the recurrent musical theme associated with the O'Hara's plantation, Tara. Central to Steiner's compositional technique, present in many of the classical Hollywood film scores he wrote, including *Cimarron* (1931), *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932), *King Kong* (1933), and *The Informer* (1935), was the idea every character should be associated with a particular musical theme and that whenever possible there should exist "direct synchronization between music

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[4] The shooting was concluded on July 1, 1939, massively over budget, its total production costs having reached $4,250,000. Originally there were five hours of film, cut first to four hours and twenty seven minutes and finally to three hours and forty minutes in its commercial version.

[5] In this order: Clark Gable, Vivien Leigh, Leslie Howard, Olivia de Havilland, the production team, David O'Selznick, Victor Fleming, Sidney Howard, including the novel's author, Margaret Mitchell.

and narrative action", coupled with "the use of the leitmotif as a structural framework."[6] (Kalinak 113)

Gone with the Wind was filmed in Technicolor, one of the major innovations in the American film industry in the 1930s. Its use involved the simultaneous exposure of three different strips of film, which added vividness, depth and amplitude to filmed sequences and accentuated particular details of the set design and décor, wardrobe, landscape and scenery. In the case of *Gone with the Wind* these aspects are particularly evident in the remarkable scenes of the barbecue at Twelve Oaks, of the dead and wounded lying outside Atlanta's main railway station, or of the burning of the city itself, in which seven Technicolor cameras were used.

Margaret Mitchell turned down Selznick's offer to collaborate directly in the making of *Gone with the Wind*, but suggested the name of Wilbur Kurtz as a consultant on the history of the South and Susan Mirren as an advisor on the customs and manners of Southerners. A number of changes were made in the adaptation of the novel to the film by screenwriter Sidney Howard, many events and scenes having been eliminated altogether.[7] The modification of lines requested by the censors of the Production Code Administration was also complied with: in the film there are no references to rape, prostitution, or the Ku Klux Klan. One exception, though, was permitted: the word "damn" in the closing scene of the film, regarded as racy language for the moral standards of the time, as dictated by Hollywood's Production Code. *Gone with the Wind* received ten Academy Awards, including Best Film for 1939.

Gone with the Wind, the novel, is set primarily against the background of the Reconstruction, the twelve-year period in American history from 1865-1877 wherein the South of the United States was under military rule, its central theme being the end of a "civilization" caused by a war fraught with high ideals, but short on pragmatics. The expression "gone

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[6] The film score of *Gone with the Wind* included sixteen main themes and close to three hundred different melody segments, which added deepness and intensity to the emotional content of the film in scenes such as Ellen O'Hara's wake, Ashley's return from the war front, or Melanie lying in her deathbed.

[7] The script was written by Sidney Howard, but several other authors worked on it, including F. Scott Fitzgerald.

with the wind" refers to the wind of destruction that had swept through Georgia and destroyed the way of life of its citizens, most notably that of the O'Haras, whose plantation had been ravaged by Northern armies: "Was Tara still standing? Or was Tara also gone with the wind which has swept through Georgia?" (Mitchell 389). Both the film and the novel hark back to the legend of a "lost civilization" of cavaliers and belles which had existed in the South before the Northern onslaught, a place where the values of honor, loyalty, chivalry dominated and where slaves had been well-treated by their masters, free from abuse and content with their existences. À-propos this lost civilization, Ashley Wilkes, the perpetual paramour of the heroine of the novel, for instance, says pragmatically in both the film and Mitchell's narrative: "In the end what will happen will be what has happened whenever a civilization breaks up. The people who have brains and courage come through and the ones who haven't are winnowed out." (Mitchell 513). In addition, he describes the perfect society which had existed before the war as a kind of "Götterdämmerung", in effect, a dusk of the gods (Mitchell 513). This idea of a lost civilization began to be cultivated soon after the conclusion of the war as Southerners started to celebrate the war and its heroes by erecting statues, building and restoring cemeteries and commemorating special dates.[8] In the periodical literature of the time, in magazines such as *New Eclectic* (later renamed the *Southern Magazine*), *Century Illustrated*, *Atlantic*, and *Scribner's*, life in the *antebellum* South began to be portrayed in fabled terms in narratives written from the perspective of Southerners, naturally, and with a much softer tone as regards the conflict and its consequences.[9] Both the film and

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[8] A reference is made in the film to the "Association for the Beautification of the Graves of the Glorious Dead".

[9] *Scribner's* published a series of articles between 1873 and 1874 entitled "The Great South", portraying this section of the Union in a much more favorable light. *Century Illustrated* did the same in articles published between November 1884 and November 1887. For detailed analyses of these matters, see Kathleen Diffley's "Home from the Theater of War: The Southern Magazines and the Recollections of War" and Janet Gabler-Hover's "The North-South Reconciliation Theme and the 'Shadow of the Negro' in *Century Illustrated Magazine*", in *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith, eds. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995).

the novel are infused with the idea that white Southerners had lost the war, but not their souls, and were now about to regain their society in a process of redemption. In fact, Mitchell's portrayal of Reconstruction corresponds to the prevailing interpretation of this period of America's past among historians of the 1930s, dominated by the works of William Dunning and John W. Burgess, whose school of thought maintained that Reconstruction had been a period of corruption and fraud dominated by Carpetbaggers without any scruples, Scalawags who had collaborated with the enemy, and ignorant freedmen unfit for taking part in the political life of the country.[10]

Reconstruction vs. Restoration

The origins of the American Civil War, the bloodiest military conflict the U.S. has ever been involved in, are well documented.[11] Suffice it to say that when the hostilities began in 1861 the country was divided sectionally between a rich and powerful industrial North and a rural, economically dependent agrarian South, with both sections of the Union underestimating each other's forces and feeling overconfident about their victory. The Civil War effectively destroyed the economy of the South, whereas that of the North slowed down as the war progressed, but then recovered its *antebellum* momentum and continued to expand over the next decades. The period of time that went from the conclusion of the Civil War (1865) to the end of military rule in the rebel states (1877) is usually referred to as "Reconstruction" and corresponds roughly to Part Two of *Gone with the Wind.* Its historiography has been full of controversy, reflecting in many instances the biases and prejudices of the scholars who have studied it. Historically, though, Northerners have tended to regard this twelve-year period as their attempt to refashion Southern society along a new model

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[10] Their most important historiographical works were, respectively, William Dunning's *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877* (New York, 1907) and John W. Burgess' *Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866-1876* (New York, 1902).

[11] The number of fatalities was staggering: 360,000 Union soldiers dead and 275,000 wounded; 258,000 Confederate soldiers dead and 100,000 wounded. Total number of deaths: 618,000. *Cf.* James Brewer Stewart, "Civil War", *The Oxford Companion to United States History* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), p. 132.

of social and political organization more in line with the aims and aspirations of the rest of the Union. Southerners, however, have shown a tendency to view it more as a process of "Restoration", a course of action whereby their pre-Civil War status within the Union could be regained.

The filmic "Reconstruction" of the Old South depicted in *Gone with the Wind* is centered on the O'Haras, a planter family from Georgia, as they struggle to hold on to the Southern way of life under the novel circumstances created by the Civil War. Although historically at the heart of this conflict had been the issue of free *versus* slave labor in the new territories of the Union, and concomitantly the legal status of the black population in American society, the issue of race relations is secondary in *Gone with the Wind*, two women dominating thematically both the novel and its filmic adaptation: Scarlett O'Hara and Melanie Wilkes played by actresses Vivien Leigh and Olivia de Havilland, respectively. Scarlet O'Hara, the cunning, shrewd daughter of a wealthy landowner, represents the Southern belle turned businesswoman. The daughter of an Irish immigrant who had married into a well-off Southern family, Scarlett is selfish, egoistical and slightly immature in both the film and the novel. She is unpatriotic and lacks interest in the war effort, caring little for the wounded, for example, when she walks among the dead and injured Confederate soldiers lying inside Atlanta's railway station. She survives the trials brought about by the conflict between the North and the South because she is able to adapt, displaying pragmatism and self-reliance, Northern qualities *par excellence*. She is ready to give up her Southern breeding and abandon her manners and morals for the sake of wealth, remarking at one point in the novel that money was the only "certain bulwark against any calamity which fate could bring" (Mitchell 635). She is ruthless as a businesswoman and is not afraid of doing business with Northerners, as she declares in the film: "I am going to make friends with the Yankee Carpetbaggers and I am going to beat them at their game."[12]

By contrast, Melanie Wilkes (*née* Hamilton), the wife of Ashley Wilkes (Leslie Howard), is pure, gentle and self-sacrificing. With her high

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[12] For this reason, at a given point in the film as well, Melanie Wilkes tells Scarlett: "You're doing business with the same people who robbed us."

morals, virtuosity and compassion, she symbolizes the *antebellum* South in both the novel and the film. Caring and loving, she displays her Christian values on many occasions, namely when she feeds ex-Confederate soldiers on the stairs of Tara in one of the scenes in the film (Scarlett sees them as a "plague of locusts" (Mitchell 496)). In the novel, she is not afraid of going to see Belle Watling (played by actress Ona Munson), the brothel owner, to thank her for having provided an alibi to Ashley on the day the Ku Klux Klan raided Shanty Town (in the film, it is Belle Watling who comes and sees her). Her humanity is particularly evident in Mitchell's fictional narrative as well when she succeeds in reconciling the two women's associations who disagreed on whether or not the graves of Yankee soldiers should be cleaned, an episode which was left out of the film. Scarlett thinks Melanie is naïve, almost stupid, for not realizing she loves her husband Ashley, the man she has been infatuated with since the famous barbecue at the Wilkes. Upon his return from the war, Ashley, just like Melanie, tries to hold on to his Southern principles of honor, gentility, respectability, though he too, like Rhett Butler (a role played by Clark Gable), as we can infer from both the novel and the film, was not convinced the "Glorious Cause" was worth dying for. Both Scarlett and Melanie are pivotal characters in the vision of the South and its people offered by Mitchell's novel and Selznick's production because they embody conflicting notions of what it meant to be a Southerner.

In hindsight, Reconstruction can only be regarded as a partial success. Although many Blacks were elected to state legislatures, held posts in government, and a small number even became members of Congress, their living conditions did not improve significantly as they remained economically dependent upon property owners through the sharecropping system. It is generally agreed that the North wished to return quickly to a situation of political normalcy in the Union and consequently turned a blind eye to many of the outrages being perpetrated against the freedmen. Moreover, the federal government had not been able to make the Freedmen's Bureau, the agency created to help the ex-slaves integrate *postbellum* society politically and economically, an effective tool in protecting and defending the newly-acquired rights of the black population. In Mitchell's narrative, the racist Tony Fontaine, for instance, justifies the murder of Jonas Wilkerson (an episode left out of the film), Tara's old overseer, precisely because he "kept

the darkies stirred up" politically, finding it unacceptable that the ex-slaves should be allowed to vote when many White Southerners had been disfranchised. Tony's words attest to the future implications of the Black vote, as he saw it: "Soon we'll be having nigger judges, nigger legislators — black apes out of the jungle —" (Mitchell 629). Yet, it is undeniable that major progress was made in some areas during this period, W. E. B. Du Bois being one of the first scholars to argue that Reconstruction had indeed brought major benefits to the Black population. In his essay "Reconstruction and its Benefits", delivered at the 1909 gathering of the *American Historical Association*, in New York City, he maintained that Reconstruction had provided all Southerners, Negroes included, access to public education, social legislation and democratic rule, a proposition which was far from being consensual among historians of the time.[13]

Yankee North and Old South

No one is more disparaged in the film version of *Gone with the Wind* than Yankees. The tone of anti-Yankeeism is set right at the beginning of the film when Ellen O'Hara (Barbara O'Neil), Scarlett's mother, returns from the home of Emmie Slatterly (Isabel Jewel) and tells her husband, Gerald O'Hara (Thomas Mitchell), to dismiss Jonas Wilkerson (Victor Jory), the best overseer Tara has ever had. Gerald offers the following remark on Wilkerson, the immoral and principleless Yankee who has fathered Emmie a child: "What else can you expect from a Yankee man and a white trash girl?" (Mitchell 73). In another sequence in the film, the very same Wilkerson is vilified by Scarlett when he shows up at the plantation with

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[13] The essay was published in the July 1910 volume of the *American Historical Association.* Du Bois' essay was embryonic to his later seminal work *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, first published in 1935, which changed the whole debate over this period. In it, Du Bois questioned the hitherto assumption that Reconstruction had failed due to Negro ignorance and incompetence and placed the struggle for the emancipation and political rights of Southern Blacks within the much wider context of "proletarian exploitation". *Cf.* David Levering Lewis' introduction to W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1995), p. xii.

Emmie, now his "trashy wench" wife. Wilkerson has prospered under Reconstruction and wishes to purchase Tara when he hears that the O'Haras cannot afford the taxes on the property. In the film itself, we hear Scarlett referring to Northerners as "Yankees, dirty Yankees" when she sees the ravaged home of the Wilkes, Twelve Oaks. In the novel, on the other hand, she calls them "a race of dollar-lovers" (169) and accuses Rhett of being a mercenary rascal like them, because he had broken the blockade and gone off to New York harbor, where the Union men had sold him goods. Scarlett blames the Yankees for the $300 worth of taxes she has to pay in order to save Tara, money which she tries to borrow unsuccessfully from Rhett.[14] Taxes were a major issue for the former plantation owners as the new state governments raised property taxes to a higher level than they had been before the war (Reynolds 226). In different ways, both Scarlett and Rhett managed to bridge the gap that separated Southern gentility from Northern businessmen by succumbing to materialism and/or greed, thus betraying Dixie in the eyes of Southern society. For this reason both may be regarded as collaborationists and/or Scalawags.

For the characters of *Gone with the Wind*, both in the novel and film, the enemies of the South during the Reconstruction period — this scourge far worse than the war or the armies of Sherman — were the Scalawags, the Carpetbaggers, the Republicans, and the Freedmen's Bureau. But who were these individuals, the object of so much denigration in both the novel and its filmic adaptation? Mitchell herself defines the Scalawags as "Southerners who had turned Republican very profitably", and the Carpetbaggers as "those Yankees who came South like buzzards after the surrender, with all their worldly possessions in one carpetbag." (507) It is a characterization that corresponds to the image viewers get of these individuals in the film, namely in the sequence where a Carpetbagger

[14] In the film, Rhett alleges that the profits he made as a blockade runner are all "tied up in foreign banks" and consequently cannot help her. In the novel, gossip has it that he actually stole the Confederate Army treasury, an accusation which is never clarified. But Rhett is well-treated by the Yankees: we see him in the film playing poker with the Union officers who are keeping guard over him after the war, while he is held in an Atlanta prison for his blockade-running activities.

offers forty acres and a mule to a "credulous black", as the city of Atlanta is being rebuilt. The phrase is an allusion to the unfulfilled pledge of President Lincoln to the freedmen of the South and which has come to symbolize one of the many broken promises of the U.S. government to this segment of the population.

A character in *Gone with the Wind* in both its literary and cinematic versions which stands out as a Scalawag is Frank Kennedy (Carroll Nye), Suellen O'Hara's (Evelyn Keys) fiancée. He is the example of a Southerner who became a successful businessman in *postbellum* Georgia as a result of his activity as a merchant in hardware, furniture and lumber (we are told in the film that he owned a "prosperous store and a lumber sawmill as a sideline"). In total disregard for her sister's feelings for him, Scarlett seduces Frank so as to obtain the $300 dollars worth of taxes she needs to save Tara from the hands of the federal taxman.[15] She marries him, eventually, and persuades him to let her buy a sawmill and to employ convict workers instead of "free darkies", the start of her business career as a tycoon who exploits cheap labor. Jonas Wilkerson, the above-mentioned overseer of Tara, and his assistant Hilton, a character omitted in the film, but who married Cathleen Calvert, a planter's daughter, are also characters who typify Scalawags.

Both the Scalawags and the Carpetbaggers were thoroughly disliked by the population of the South and the object of vilification and violence during the Reconstruction period. They were often thought to be, or to have been, collaborationists, traitors, or rogues.[16] Historically, though, among the Carpetbaggers we find not only the Northern investors and entrepreneurs who went South in search of a business opportunity, but also the Union soldiers who decided to stay behind. We find, too, the members of the American Missionary Association who developed their community

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[15] Merchants like Frank Kennedy, the owners of stores that popped up all over the countryside of the South, were the only class to do well financially in the aftermath of the conflict, because they sold goods on credit.

[16] "Waving the bloody shirt" — the shirt of Carpetbaggers flogged by Whites — was a common feature of Southern life during the *postbellum* period (Brogan 355).

work there after the great conflict. In his *History of the United States* (2001), Hugh Brogan observes: "No two groups [Scalawags and Carpetbaggers] have been more maligned in American history, precisely because Reconstruction could not have gone so far as it did without them." (361)

Race and Politics

There were two reactions when the South entered politics under the administration of Andrew Johnson: one violent, as the riots, massacres and Ku Klux Klan activities attest; the other, legal, embodied in the so-called "Black Codes" (1865-1866) the Southern legislatures enacted soon after they were restored. Prevented from participating directly in the political process through the Democratic Party, many Whites engaged in the destabilizing activities of the Ku Klux Klan, the Knights of the White Camelia, or the Redeemers.[17] For these white supremacist groups, "redeeming" meant saving the South from the grips of Republican Party control, which had been slow to react to Klan violence (Perman 40). The historian Eric Foner writes in his *Reconstruction – America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (1989) that "the Klan was a military force serving the interests of the Democratic party, the planter class, and all those who desired the restoration of white supremacy." (425) Fearful, thus, of what is termed as "Negro rule" in the novel, Frank Kennedy, Scarlett's second husband, and Ashley, Melanie's husband, raid Shanty Town with other well-meaning citizens, under the pretence that they wish to punish Scarlett's attempted rape and/or robbery (Mitchell 786).[18] (In the filmic adaptation of the novel, though, we are told that the purpose of the raid was to clean the woods of

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[17] The Redeemers included "secessionist Democrats and Union Whigs, veterans of the Confederacy and rising young leaders, traditional planters and advocates of a modernized New South" (Foner 588). Its political program matched the political agenda of White supremacists: to convince Northern capitalists to invest in the South; that Southerners should take control of the political process in their states; that Southern Whites knew what was best for the freed Blacks and for Dixie.

[18] Full details of this episode can be found in chapter XLV of the novel, pp. 772-94. For white Southerners, "negro rule" meant that ex-slaves could now be seen in positions of authority as sheriffs, postmasters, and other low-ranking administrative posts.

undesirables.) The "political meeting", as it is alluded to in the film, attended by these well-meaning Southern citizens, was in fact a *vigilanti* raid on Shanty Town carried out by the Ku Klux Klan, a reference which is omitted in the film but not in the novel.

Another episode which is omitted in the film but is quite revealing as to the level of violence perpetrated against those thought to be collaborating with the enemy is the murder of Wilkerson, the former overseer of Tara and an official of the Freedmen's Bureau (in the film adaptation only), stabbed cold-bloodedly by Tony Fontaine on account of his "nigger-equality business" and for believing that "niggers had a right to — white women." (Mitchell 630)[19] Many Southerners felt that the Klan violence committed against the black population paled in comparison to the ignominies committed by Negroes against white women, this being what had spurred Southern men into action, according to the narrator of *Gone with the Wind*: "It was the large number of outrages on women and the ever-present fear for the safety of their wives and daughters that drove Southern men to cold and trembling fury and caused the Ku Klux Klan to spring up over night." (Mitchell 640). Though not interested in politics, Scarlett had heard "say that the South was being treated as a conquered province and that vindictiveness was a dominant policy of all conquerors." (Mitchell 507) Unaware that Ashley and Frank were involved in KKK activities, Scarlett confesses at one point in the novel that it was unfortunate that Southerners had had to take the law into their own hands, in line with the widely-held belief among Southern gentility that the North wanted to keep the South down so as to prevent it from rising to its feet once again. Indeed, resorting to violence so as to settle disputes was thought to be a personality trait of Southerners, as the words of the Yankee captain who comes looking for the culprits of the raid on Shanty Town make clear in the film: "It's about time you rebels learned you can't take the law into your own hands."

The South had a long tradition of "regulation", or vigilantism. During Reconstruction, the activities of the above-mentioned *vigilanti* groups aimed to reassert Democratic control over the political process in the

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[19] For the gruesome details of this episode, see chapter XXXVII, pp. 628-32.

South, as these paralegal groups attacked and victimized not only Blacks, but also Scalawags and Carpetbaggers (Northern teachers included). Active from 1867 onwards, these secret societies were terror organizations (an original American invention) who considered it as their Christian responsibility to keep Blacks in their place. They intimidated mostly the black population so that it would not participate in the political lives of their communities or take on posts in the state or federal administration. Foner observes in this respect: "Through this constant vilification of blacks, carpetbaggers, scalawags, and Reconstruction, 'the old political leaders' fostered a climate that condoned violence as a legitimate weapon in the struggle for Redemption."[20] (434). Scarlett, herself, shows no sympathy for Negroes in Mitchell's novel, thinking them stupid: "They never thought of anything unless they were told." (Mitchell 400) The exception are the three loyal Black servants who stayed behind at Tara, Mammy, Pork and Dilcey, while the remaining ones, over one hundred, are described by the narrator of *Gone with the Wind* as "trashy niggers" because they had left with the Yankees (Mitchell 399). As a matter of fact, there is no concern for or empathy with the plight of the Negro on the part of the narrator of *Gone with the Wind.* Mitchell may occasionally draw on the use of "local color", reproducing the dialect and/or pronunciation of Southern Blacks, but that is done purely for literary effect. Consequently, both Mitchell's novel and Selznick's filmic adaptation of it reinforced the prevailing view of Reconstruction among Southerners in the 1930s, a period which they associated with abusive business practices, corrupt government officials and a drifting mass of ignorant Negroes at a loss to find their place in the

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[20] The activities of these terror organizations grew so intense that President Ulysses S. Grant ordered in 1871 the so-called "KKK trials", following a series of racial incidents in South Carolina. The 1871 report on the activities of the Ku Klux Klan in this state concluded that "in the nine counties covered by the investigation for a period of approximately six months, the Ku Klux Klan lynched and murdered 35 men, whipped 262 men and women, otherwise outraged, shot, mutilated, burned out, etc., 101 persons." Quoted in W. E. B. Du Bois, *Reconstruction*, p. 676. Two other major episodes of racial violence at the time were the Coushatta Massacre, in which six White men murdered eight Negroes, and the Colfax Massacre, which took place in Louisiana, on Easter Sunday, 1873, where 280 Negroes were killed.

new, reconstructed South.[21] For David Reynolds, "The Compromise of 1877" between Northern Republicans and "Redeemers", those Southern conservatives who changed tactics when the federal government outlawed the Ku Klux Klan in 1871, effectively sealed the demise of Blacks to social and political equality in the South (228).

Conclusion

Unquestionably, the end of the Civil War and the Reconstruction period that followed represented major steps in the consolidation of the American nationality, putting an end to one of the ugliest aspects of the American political nation — chattel slavery. However, the vision we have of the South and Southerners in *Gone with the Wind*, the novel, and its eponymous film adaptation, is one where the wounds caused by the Civil War are still open. The South may have been redeemed during Reconstruction, but it was a redemption accomplished through violence, intimidation and revenge, not for the nation as a whole, but rather for its white population. In that sense, neither the film nor the novel helped Southern Whites reconcile themselves with their history, much less with their black, fellow citizens. Notwithstanding this, the possibility of reconciliation between Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler, an estranged couple in the final chapter of the book and in the closing sequences of the film, lingers on in the minds of readers and/or viewers of *Gone with the Wind*, pointing perhaps to a not so distant future where the North and the South will come together and partake unequivocally in America's promise of justice, fairness and equality for all.

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[21] Brogan argues that the Reconstruction program failed because it was backward-looking in its attempt "to make over the South in the image of the *antebellum* north", attributing that failure to two sets of reasons: in the first place, the South was thoroughly divided over race, between ex-Confederates and Republicans (whether Scalawags or Carpetbaggers) and naturally on the issue of class (i.e. between yeoman farmers, poor landless whites, and a landed, though bankrupt, planter aristocracy); secondly, economics: land continued in the hands of the planter class, though it was impoverished, bankrupt and politically weakened (Brogan 364-5).

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Abstract

David O. Selznick's filmic adaptation of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) is informed by the same kind of Romantic nostalgia we find in the pages of this timeless award-winning novel, offering its viewers a conflicting vision over the nature and significance of the period of time which followed the end of the American Civil War. Northerners understood that period as one of "Reconstruction", whereas Southerners envisaged it more as a time of "Restoration". I wish to examine in this paper how producer David O. Selznick attempts to redeem the South in his filmic adaptation of this text, in line with the essential premise(s) of Mitchell's novel, through his representation of a pre-Civil War idyllic, romanticized South, devoid of the pernicious effects of the "peculiar institution", subjected in a first instance to the aggression of a great Northern invader and upon its defeat by a civilian army of Carpetbaggers.

Keywords

Carpetbaggers and Scalawags; Ku Klux Klan; Reconstruction; Redeemers; Yankees and Anti-Yankeeism

Resumo

A adaptação fílmica do romance de Margaret Mitchell *Gone with the Wind* (1936) por David O. Selznick está imbuída do mesmo tipo de nostalgia romântica que podemos encontrar nas páginas inesquecíveis desta premiada obra. A adaptação fílmica do romance coloca os espectadores do filme perante duas visões do Sul no que diz respeito à natureza e ao significado do período que se seguiu à conclusão da Guerra Civil Americana. Os Unionistas entenderam-no como tendo sido um período de "Reconstrução", enquanto os Sulistas tenderam a considerá-lo como uma época de "Restauração". Neste ensaio pretende-se analisar o modo como o produtor David O. Selznick redime o Sul na sua adaptação fílmica do romance de Mitchell, de acordo com a(s) premissa(s) essencial(ais) da obra em

questão, ao sugerir uma representação idílica e romantizada de um sul pré-Guerra Civil isento do impacto pernicioso da chamada "instituição peculiar", sujeito numa primeira instância à agressão do grande invasor do Norte, e após a sua derrota a um exército civil de *Carpetbaggers*.

Palavras Chave

Carpetbaggers and Scalawags; Ku Klux Klan; Reconstrução; Redentores; *Yankees* and *Anti-Yankeeismo*